

# Culture Shock

---

It's very common to experience culture shock when you arrive in a country with different customs and traditions. Culture shock is the body's normal response to change, when you no longer feel as in control as you did in your home country.

You may experience many different emotions, including excitement, frustration, anxiety, fear of the unknown and 'sensory overload', when your body is over-stimulated by your environment. Many international students experience sensory overload when they have been given lots of information over a short time and are struggling to process it all.

## Symptoms of culture shock

Most international students will be affected by culture shock, but not everyone will experience the same feelings.

Symptoms of culture shock include:

- extreme tiredness
- overpowering homesickness; questioning your decision to study abroad
- feeling isolated and helpless
- changes in sleeping or eating habits
- nausea
- feeling unable to concentrate
- withdrawing – spending lots of time in your room and not mixing with others
- headaches
- feeling irritable or angry
- believing New Zealand customs or ways of doing things are wrong.

## Stages of culture shock

There are different theories on ways people adapt to a new culture. One theory identifies four stages, and says the time it takes to overcome each stage will be different for everyone.

### Stage 1: Honeymoon stage

You may be excited by the things that are new and different from your home culture. If you write a list of everything you like about New Zealand now, it may be helpful to be reminded of these things if you later go on to enter the frustration stage of culture shock.

# Culture Shock

---

## Stages of culture shock (cont'd)

### Stage 2: Frustration stage

Without your support systems from home, you may feel lonely, frustrated, confused, angry and critical of New Zealand. This stage may take some time to overcome, and may lead to anxiety disorders if you do not seek help or find ways to overcome your culture shock.

It can help to find a healthy distraction. You could cook a meal from home for your homestay family, watch your favourite TV programme or go for a walk. You may feel like taking a break from everything new, but it's not helpful to shut yourself away in your bedroom all the time.

### Stage 3: Adjustment stage

Day-to-day life may be getting easier. You may be starting to understand New Zealand culture and Kiwis' gestures and body language.

### Stage 4: Acceptance stage

You may feel a sense of comfort with your environment, and the language barrier may be less of a problem. You may still feel homesick sometimes, but you may feel more confident about how to overcome these feelings.

## Where to go for help

Your international staff are experienced in helping students with culture shock, so ask them for advice and ideas.

You could also try:

- asking other students how they got over culture shock
- staying in regular contact with friends and family from home
- decorating your room with things that remind you of home
- learning as much as you can about New Zealand, such as what is considered polite or rude, and Kiwi body language
- join a club or take up a hobby
- try not to judge the way things are done in New Zealand
- make an effort to learn English
- learn ways to overcome stress
- make a list of goals you want to achieve in New Zealand.